



## URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

April 30, 2012

STRENGTHENING  
THE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
AS AN ESSENTIAL  
PART OF URBAN LIFE

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
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**Re: Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization – WC Docket No. 11-42  
Lifeline and Link Up – WC Docket No. 03-109  
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service – CC Docket No. 96-45  
Advancing Broadband Availability through Digital Literacy Training – WC Docket  
No. 12-23**

Dear Secretary Dortch:

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) respectfully writes in support of comments submitted in this proceeding by the American Library Association (ALA) to increase the capacity of libraries across the nation to support the digital literacy needs of their communities.

ULC is a membership association which includes 130 leading public library systems that collectively serve approximately 90 million people. Our programs and services focus on four strategic areas: enhancing recognition of the 21st century public library as an essential community asset; leading education and lifelong learning initiatives in public libraries; building libraries' capacity to serve as a key partner for local sustainability; and spearheading new research that supports the digital evolution occurring within communities and their libraries.

In partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ULC is currently leading a consortium of key library support organizations (including ALA) in a multi-year initiative to establish "first-ever" benchmarks that will enable libraries and local government leaders everywhere to assess the quality and impact of the crucial public access technology services that libraries provide. The extensive research that informs this groundbreaking effort supports ALA's conviction that strengthening people's *access* and *ability* to fully avail themselves of the opportunities that digital technology offers is an urgent national priority. In urban areas - where the vast majority of low-income populations reside - the digital divide is as great as for people in the most remote rural communities.

While ULC's members primarily represent urban and suburban communities, lessons from their work are made available and adapted by library leaders everywhere who are committed to the continuous evolution and strengthening of libraries to meet changing community needs. One of ULC's members, the Free Library of Philadelphia is currently

developing a new approach to reaching underserved neighborhoods by linking its resources to those of community-based organizations and citywide partners. In their words, “Recognizing the grave civic danger of a digitally segregated city, the Free Library (chooses) to collaborate with strong community and governmental partners to alleviate our shared municipal distress.”

The Urban Libraries Council supports the following points made by ALA and requests their careful consideration. The Urban Libraries Council:

- Is opposed to adding a digital literacy component to the E-rate program. E-rate discounts are a critical resource for our libraries’ connectivity and infrastructure needs. Some libraries receive an average E-rate program discount of 75% on telecommunications and internet access charges. E-rate has played a pivotal role in helping libraries connect their users with the internet. This access enables libraries to share resources, assist students with practice tests and class assignments, and serve adults with employment and other forms. The program should not be altered to include digital literacy;
- Is opposed to a match requirement. Such a requirement would discourage many libraries from applying;
- Supports funding libraries that currently offer digital literacy training, in addition to those that do not currently offer training;
- Supports a minimum funding level of \$25,000 per entity per year and a two-year application cycle;
- Supports a flexible program design that includes state-wide consortium applications to maximize the number of libraries that could benefit from the initiative and minimize the burden on smaller libraries. Experience in other areas reinforces the opinion that consortium applications would likely support the most cost-effective implementation of the program; and
- Suggest that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) build on the experience of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in developing the digital literacy program.

ULC thanks the Federal Communications Commission for its support of the work that public libraries do to advance continued development of the digital literacy skills necessary to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our members are ready and able to share the lessons of their experience with libraries, government and community leaders everywhere so that the benefits of digital technology can be fully realized.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan Benton  
President & CEO